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Hearing of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia

US-Pakistan Relations: Assassination, Instability and the Future of US Policy

2141 Rayburn House Office Building, 16 January 2008, 2:00 PM

The Middle East and South Asia Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee held a hearing on U.S. policy towards Pakistan in the wake of **Benazir Bhutto's** assassination and subsequent political turmoil.

In opening remarks, several members discussed the problems that have emerged from the United States relationship with Pakistan's President **Pervez Musharraf**, who recently retired as chief of staff of the military. Rep. **Gary Ackerman** (D-NY), chairman of the Subcommittee, summarized the recent events that occurred prior to the assassination. He blamed Musharraf for **contributing to tensions within Pakistan** as the retired general struggled to maintain power. Rep. Ackerman recommended that the United States must reevaluate how it allocates aid to Pakistan and focus on its efforts on the entire country rather than the military complex.

Rep. **David Scott** (D-GA) echoed Rep. Ackerman's sentiments on the U.S. relationship with Musharraf. Scott asked, "Are we putting all of our eggs in one basket, which may be the wrong basket in the eyes of the people of Pakistan?" Rep. **Dana Rohrabacher** (R-CA) urged his fellow members **to be more cautious in their words against Musharraf**, reminding his peers that he has been an important ally in the War on Terror. He recommended that Musharraf hold free and fair elections and seek additional time in office through democratic means.

Criticizing past inconsistencies of U.S. foreign policy, Rep. **Joseph Crowley** (D-NY) asserted that the United States must stop supporting authoritarian leaders when it is convenient. Crowley claimed that the U.S. government seems willing to support undemocratic regimes despite its rhetoric on spreading democracy.

In her testimony, **C. Christine Fair**, Ph.D. of RAND Corporation claimed that the American and Pakistani governments have contributed to the current crisis, accusing Washington of focusing on Musharraf and forgiving his unconstitutional actions. "The United States must transition from supporting one person and the army." She urged the Subcommittee to back the institutions and processes that would buttress a representative democracy, such as the media and the judiciary. She also recommended that the U.S. government should reach out to all political parties and civil society groups. While Fair advocated for a continued relationship with Pakistan's armed forces, she proposed that certain deals should be contingent on U.S. interests.

Ashley J. Tellis, Ph.D. of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace claimed that Musharraf has been able to stay in power by virtue of political irregularities within the country.

Tellis admitted that he was uncertain about the outcome of upcoming parliamentary elections. However, he mentioned that there was the possibility that the Pakistani people might be unhappy with election results and question their fairness and validity. In this scenario, the United States would be forced to choose between supporting the winner of the elections and supporting the general public.

On the subject of military aid, Tellis cautioned the Subcommittee from hastily ending funding or arms deals. To do so, he argued, would confirm Pakistani notions that the United States is an inconsistent ally. Tellis urged the government to move away from transactional behavior with Pakistan and establish a stable, reciprocal alliance.

Lisa Curtis of The Heritage Foundation told the committee that the current political situation in Pakistan is a transitional phase. Washington and Islamabad should work together to ensure that stable democracy emerges out of the situation. She said that Pakistan needs political reform and economic development in order to rescue itself from current turmoil.

Curtis also contended that it is difficult to distinguish between the actions of local militants and foreign terrorists, suggesting a critical danger for the government. Despite concerns over Pakistan's nuclear arsenal falling into the wrong hands, Curtis discouraged the U.S. government from confiscating the materials. She applauded past diplomatic efforts to secure these weapons and recommended that the government pursue similar measures.